

THE GROWTH OF INDIVIDUALISM

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England as to social ethics. For it brings no distinctive contribution, and, except by a few eccentrics, the very conception of the Church as an independent moral authority, whose standards may be in sharp antithesis to social conventions, has been abandoned.

An institution which possesses no philosophy of its own inevitably accepts that which happens to be fashionable. What set the tone of social thought in the eighteenth century was partly the new Political Arithmetic, which had come to maturity at the Restoration, and which, as was to be expected in the first great age of English natural science—the age of Newton, Halley, and of the Royal Society—drew its inspiration, not from religion or morals, but from mathematics and physics. It was still more the political theory associated with the name of Locke, but popularized and debased by a hundred imitators. Society is not a community of classes with varying functions, united to each other by mutual obligations arising from their relation to a common end. It is a joint-stock company rather than an organism, and the liabilities of the shareholders are strictly limited. They enter it in order to insure the rights already vested in them by the immutable laws of nature. The State, a matter

of convenience, not of supernatural
sanctions, exists for
the protection of those rights, and fulfils its
object in so
far as, by maintaining contractual freedom,
it secures
full scope for their unfettered exercise.

The most important of such rights are
property
rights, and property rights attach mainly,
though not,
of course, exclusively, to the higher orders
of men,
who hold the tangible, material " stock " of
society.

Those who do not subscribe to the company
have no
legal claim to a share in the profits,
though they have
a moral claim on the charity of their
superiors. Hence

the curious phraseology which treats almost
all below
the nobility, gentry, and freeholders as
"the poor"
—and the poor, it is well known, are of two
kinds, " the